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ABSTRACT

Kindergarten provides the child with an introduction to the outside world and to various work activities appropriate to his stage of development. In order to select such activities, the kindergarten teacher must understand the child's growth, developmental, and learning processes both before he has entered school and during his kindergarten year. During this year, factual knowledge is expanded, reasoning and problem solving abilities are developed, and expanded social contacts and cooperative behavior are encouraged. The kindergarten teacher should both carefully plan the work periods which foster these developmental processes, and evaluate the behavioral results of each period. Thus, serving as an observer, reinforcer, positive critic, admirer, suggester, and nondirective guide, the teacher encourages a progressively more motivated and successful learner. (JM)

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THE WORK PERIOD IN THE KINDERGARTEN

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The kindergarten introduces the child to school. The kindergarten teacher introduces the child to a whole new world. Those decisions which the teacher makes concerning each child's kindergarten program are crucial and may well affect the child's entire school career. Certain knowledges concerning child development and education are therefore essential for the kindergarten teacher as she goes about the on-going task of selecting the most appropriate activities for individuals and groups of youngsters in her class.

Maturation and Learning

Growth is the progressive development of a child's capacities which leads to expanded facility in functioning. The interaction of the child and his environment allows for this growth process to take place. Development progresses as a result of MATURATION and LEARNING. As MATURATION takes place, the child passes through successive developmental stages, during which growth changes are demonstrated. Maturational changes are qualitative and not induced or affected by learning. Maturation involves successive biological processes which increase competence as well as ability to adapt. The structure and function of muscles, for example, change with maturity, allowing for increasing efficiency in activities concerned with movement.

LEARNING involves changes through experience. The biological pattern for growth and development is set when the child is conceived. The extent and direction of the realization of biological potential depends upon learning (experiencing), and, ultimately, upon the use of envir onment in experiencing. The degree to which a dynamic and positive relationship exists between heredity and environment determines the degree to which expanding facility in functioning is achieved.

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In general, growth takes place in an orderly manner. There are predictable sequences of development. This does not, of course, suggest that it is unnecessary to appreciate and foster a child's uniqueness and individuality. It does suggest, however, that at any given developmental level new behaviors emerge which grow out of old ones. Thus, an orderly sequence of learning activities based on developmental or maturational growth levels is essential to evolving proficiency in functioning.

Developmental Tasks

At each successive growth level, there are specific developmental tasks--fundamental necessary accomplishments which form the base for progressing to the next level. During early childhood (pre-kindergarten), these tasks include learning to talk, to relate to other people, to relate to the rest of the world (a limited world, naturally), to distinguish between right and wrong and the like. The major developmental tasks of middle childhood (5-9 years) are directed toward these three major accomplishments: (1) developing individual physical skills; (2) mastering mental or intellectual skills--acquiring knowledge; and (3) developing a wider circle of security upon moving from the home to school--learning to get along with and become a member of a group of peers.[1] These tasks, then, are specifically concerned with the child's physical, intellectual and social-emotional development.

Middle childhood is the period when most children enter the fascinating environment which represents the outside world to them--the school. This is a world away from the security of self and family. Before he goes to school, the child's general involvements have been with the world of play. In school play continues; however, WORK also enters the child's life.

What is this five year old like--this child who must now begin to "work" in order to satisfy his developmental needs? His physical growth is slower than at any time between infancy and adolescence. His appetite is still not keen--he may require a midmorning or midafternoon snack. All motor skills are developing rapidly during this period. Self-care activities improve. Creative activities expand as a by-product of improved physical and mental skills. There is the beginning of the business of

"carrying one's own load in life."[2]

Such work activities as cutting, pasting, clay modeling, painting, working with puzzles, sharing experiences, role playing, building with blocks and the like are begun or enlarged upon. Factual knowledge is expanded. Reasoning and problem solving abilities are developed in relation to the degree to which opportunities are provided to reason and solve simple, specific problems related to the child's everyday living.

Preparation is made for expanded social contacts and cooperative behavior is encouraged through the initiation of "work type" activities. Such experiences, which involve problem solving and critical thinking, help develop appropriate social behaviors. Attitudes and habits, both intellectual and emotional, are set. The child closely observes and imitates adult behavior in order to find out who he is and what he can do. If the environment is positive and encouraging, a sense of initiative develops, as well as self-control and a conscience. The child who does not have adequate opportunity to solve problems, or who is made to feel anxious through over-critical feedback or punishment, cannot solve his problems about himself and his environment. He cannot relate or interact; therefore he cannot continue to grow in an orderly, sequential manner. He may either remain fixed at this level of growth, or be headed for trouble at the next developmental level.

Work Periods in the Kindergarten

The problem solving or creative "work period" in the kindergarten provides the child with the opportunity to reach conclusions by testing ideas and behaviors. Thus, a broad base is built for the expansion of knowledge. The work period further provides opportunities to develop appropriate social attitudes and skills. The three developmental tasks of this age group, developing individual physical skills, acquiring knowledge, and learning to get along with peers, are met in the work period.

The initiation of this activity involves the presentation to the children of a wide variety of ideas which grow out of experiences. These ideas are shared and discussed in a session preceding the work period. A variety of individual or group

problems may be undertaken during the work period. The teacher serves as an observer, reinforcer, positive critic, admirer, suggester, and non-directive guide. It is her function to be sure that, throughout the school year, each child advances not only in the number and kind of materials with which he works but also in the number and kind of ideas which he expresses and problems he undertakes to solve. Seeing that a child's project is completed before he commences another is an essential facet of the teacher's role in the work period. The teacher must also be concerned with recognizing which ideas suggested by a child are feasible for the work period, which will accomplish its objectives, which can be done with a minimum of teacher supervision, and which are of most importance to the child's continuing physical, intellectual and social-emotional development.[3]

The following objectives for the work period are suggested by Foster and Headley:[4]

1. To offer frequent opportunities for the child to meet concrete problem-solving situations.
2. To help the child acquire the ability to plan and carry out individual or group projects.
3. To encourage the child to complete a task he has undertaken.
4. To acquaint the child with the various materials available for self-expression.
5. To offer the child an opportunity to share ideas and materials.
6. To provide opportunities for the child to engage in activities which will develop motor skills.
7. To help the child establish habits of orderliness.
8. To afford the child the satisfaction of experimenting and achieving.

In the beginning of the school year, it is essential that the teacher stress the social side of the work period if the program is to be truly developmental. The children must get to know each other and develop social skills before they can embark upon the interactions which the work period requires and which it teaches.[5] Many of the activities at the beginning of the year are socializing activities rather than work activities. However, while such activities as those involving the house

corner, manipulative materials or painting belong in the work period at the beginning of the school year, a true concept of the nature of work requires that such activities not be continued in the same way throughout the school year. One specific behavioral objective of the work period, for example, is the child's organizing his efforts toward a given purpose. A later behavioral objective involves the undertaking of cooperative projects by the children based on specific interests. Such objectives require that children move from isolated socializing activities to the incorporation of these and other activities into cooperative ventures. If children are to continue along the developmental continuum, standards for outcomes of work periods must be raised and individual improvements encouraged. The teacher is therefore responsible not only for guiding the planning but also for evaluating the behavioral outcomes of each work period. Without positive teacher feedback, the work period will not meet its objectives in increasingly advanced developmental behaviors.

The motivated, interested child-worker will work during a work period. His success will form the basis of a "set to learn", thus developing a progressively more motivated and successful learner.

FOOTNOTES

1. Ethel Kawin. Early and Middle Childhood--Parenthood in a Free Nation, Volume II. (Toronto : Collier-Macmillan, Ltd., 1963), p. 141.

2. Marian E. Breckenridge and E. Lee Vincent. Child Development. (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Company, 1965), p. 423.

3. Josephine C. Foster and Neith E. Headley. Education in the Kindergarten. Fourth edition. (New York: American Book Company, 1966), pp. 191-193.

4 Ibid., p. 187.

5. Ibid., p. 195.